

Is your country doing enough to make sure that nobody gets left behind?

By Adelle Lee (16A15)

Singapore is known for its highly competitive and fast-paced society, and this inevitably leaves those who are less inclined in various fields like the workplace, school or even the physically impaired, behind. Yet, this is not the case in Singapore, as the Singapore government does its best to put into place schemes, policies and laws. These create many opportunities to help lift the poor out of poverty, the workers to constantly improve themselves to remain competitive for this globalised world, and to help the elderly and the disabled integrate cohesively into society. Hence, I believe that my country, Singapore, is doing enough to ensure that nobody gets left behind.

Firstly, the government of Singapore creates opportunities for everyone economically, by providing funds and money to those who need it to help themselves progress further in society. The government recognises that education is key in pulling and lifting people out of poverty, as education provides the necessary basic skills and certificates to get employed and receive an income. Hence, it provides free education for primary school for every Singaporean citizen and secondary and tertiary fees at a subsidised amount. Even the tuition fees of local universities that are ranked highly on a global scale like NTU and NUS are relatively cheap, with NUS offering Law at \$17,100 per year with MOE's tuition grant subsidy, as compared to US universities which offer Law at a hefty \$56,086 per year. By providing free and subsidised education for the masses, even the poor can attend school, and hence can be exposed to learning and basic education, necessary for them to get a job and not be left behind in this competitive society.

Furthermore, the government also recognises the importance of workers staying competitive in the economy, and the repercussions if one's skills become obsolete over time. Hence, the government also pumped in money in the form of directed and targeted funding called SkillsFuture credits, which blue-collar workers, who face a higher risk of unemployment due to outsourcing triggered by globalisation, can use to improve themselves and go for retraining. With the announcement that they would be allocating \$1 million to this SkillsFuture programme, it can also be concluded that the government has indeed done much. With its sheer financial muscles, it is providing help to people who are disadvantaged to seize the opportunities that they could not previously, due to the nature of society and the lack of monetary means. It can also be said that the government has put in much thought on this issue, as they have also strategically planned their allocation of money in a sense that they have restricted the use of SkillsFuture credits to only retraining programmes, unlike other welfare states in the world which give benefits in the form of real money. The government's execution of this helped to ensure that the poor do not jeopardise their own future by squandering the given money on unnecessary things like alcohol and gambling, which would set them back even further despite government efforts. As such, I feel that my country is indeed doing enough in the economic aspect to ensure that everyone progresses forward, be it through education or the workplace, and their efforts to even help those who stray off the path to progress are indeed commendable.

In addition, the government creates a fair environment for everyone to compete in, thus providing opportunities not only for the rich, but also for the poor, elderly and disabled. As the disabled and elderly face much discrimination in the workplace due to their lack of skill and physical strength, the government addressed this by placing policies such that companies are more incentivised to hire these groups of

people, and laws that a company must not deny work from a disabled person or the elderly just because of their identity. In recent years, the reduction of corporate tax for companies that fire these disadvantaged groups have proven to be effective, as renowned food chains like MOS Burger and Pepper Lunch are hiring such groups, and it suggests that such companies are more willing to provide opportunities and make judgements devoid of discrimination. Furthermore, the government has also once again targeted the root cause of progress, which is education. As aforementioned, the government subsidizes education fees for Singaporean citizens. However, not only did they do that, they also made sure that every school is a good school, in terms of the facilities provided like music rooms, science labs and even sports facilities. The government also dispatched quality teachers who are well-trained to every school, ensuring that the quality of teaching is constant through the nation, and that every student gets to learn from the best. Through this, it does not matter whether a rich child goes to a prestigious private school or a poorer child attends a government school; the exposure of both groups of children will still be the same and the quality of learning will be still comparable. In addition, the government also caters to the disabled by creating schools like M.I.N.D.S, to allow these handicapped students to also have a chance in life. Hence, through the government's widespread efforts to invest in infrastructure and policies to facilitate an environment of non-discrimination, and instead one of comfort to work and learn in, it shows that the country is indeed doing a lot to ensure equal opportunities for everyone, making sure nobody, regardless of economic stature, mental and physical ability, age and class is left behind.

Yet, it must be highlighted that the government's influence may just not be enough to completely change workplace environments to accepting ones that do not discriminate. Some huge companies, while also heavily invested in the welfare of their employees, are not swayed by the government's policies and incentives, as they are powerful and rich and do not need to subscribe to the government's ideas and encouragement to be more inclusive. Furthermore, retail shops, especially those promoting a certain stereotype or advocating some form of beauty standards like The Body Shop and Burberry, have turned down employees based on their looks, and in a sense denied them of opportunities. Furthermore, while the government may be able to hold a fairly large influence over education, external factors may tilt the playing field once again, making the opportunities that the government provided less prominent and valuable by raising the bar. Such external factors include the extra financial muscle that some parents possess to elect their children to an even higher level holistically, such as providing tuition to improve their grades, extra sports trainings or leadership classes. While these factors push a generation of children to their zenith, it also suggests that those who do not possess the means to remain compatible will fall behind again, and this is unfortunately out of the government's control.

In conclusion, I still feel that the government is doing enough to ensure that nobody gets left behind, and their efforts are commendable and rather significant, seeing that the nation is progressing as a whole in recent years and not just the upper part of the social echelon. Yet, there are still some factors that may hinder the effects of the government's strategies to fully manifest in society, such as the government's inadequate influence over some parts of the economy, and the inevitability of external factors that may cause unfairness in competition despite the carefully constructed fair environment that the government has formulated. All in all, the government is doing well according to their capabilities, but just not enough as there is still room for improvement.

Comments:

Sound discussion of valid issues with apt use of supporting evidence, although some claims and assertions could have been more clearly qualified. The use of supporting evidence could have been more consistent for some parts. Nevertheless, a decent attempt.

